



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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Action to prevent clergy sex abuse and a look toward the future

People understandably want to know what the Church will do in response to the sin and crime of clergy sex abuse of minors, especially how to prevent it.

And as a way to force the Church to make changes (or out of disgust), some people have left the Church, or withheld their time, talent or treasure.

Speaking only for myself, I don't need others to force my hand to make changes to prevent sex abuse; I want it as much as the next person.

Rather, I need partners, who are active members in the Church, willing to share their time, talent and treasure to do the necessary.

With regard to the necessary, again, speaking for myself, my sway is pretty much limited, and doesn't include questions like who can be ordained.

Yes, I have a voice, and I use it to question and challenge, but I'm also aware that it's not like E.F. Hutton, where when I talk, people listen.

What follows are action steps, related to sex abuse of minors, that have been in place here, or that we are seeking to put in place:

In place: Since 2002, criminal background checks are done for seminarians, permanent deacons, priests, bishops, Church employees and volunteers.

In place: Since 2002, safe environment training is required for seminarians, permanent deacons, priests, bishops, Church employees and volunteers.

In place: Since 1993, no priest who is guilty of sex abuse of a minor is allowed to exercise ministry.

In place: Since 2006, the list of priests who had claims of sex abuse made against them has been posted on our Archdiocesan website.

In place: Since 2005, the Vatican has directed bishops that they may not accept as seminarians any men who practice homosexuality, or have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called "gay culture."

In place: Great care is taken regarding the education and formation of candidates for priesthood in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

In place: Everyone is encouraged, if they see or hear something hinting of clergy sex abuse of minors, to say something.

Seeking to put in place: More women are being invited to serve as members of the Archdiocesan Review Board.

Seeking to put in place: Inquiries are being made about a third-party reporting system to receive complaints of sex abuse against a cleric, including a bishop, and to forward them to the appropriate authorities.

Seeking to put in place: The recitation of the prayer to St. Raphael (the archangel guardian of our Archdiocese) for healing is being encouraged.

Seeking to put in place: We are praying and working to recruit more seminarians for our Archdiocese.

Curious. How is more seminarians a positive step in our response to the recent scandals of clergy sex abuse of minors?

For one, our present seminarians have grown up with this issue, and were likely taught how to recognize grooming and bad touch, and who to tell if either happens. In short, they are aware.

Secondly, the application process is rigorous, involving, for example, a psychological evaluation, a visit to the family home, and letters of recommendation, in order to determine if the man has the overall good health needed to live as a diocesan priest in this place and time.

Thirdly, clergy sex abuse of minors has influenced the standards for accepting a candidate (such as the one mentioned above, adopted in 2005).

Fourthly, the same issue has also affected the formation program for seminarians, and the evaluation as to their worthiness for ordination.

Lastly, seminary is not just about learning prayers and theology, but also about human formation, that is, how to relate appropriately to all people.

Thanks be to God, we have more seminarians. This fall, 7 new men joined the other 16 seminarians already studying for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

If any good might come from the storm of the clergy sex abuse scandals, it would to purify the motives of our seminarians.

It's hard to imagine they are pursuing priesthood to enjoy power, privilege, or perks. Those really don't exist for clergy any more, and where they do exist, seminarians are formed to turn them down.

Therefore, what else would motivate our 23 seminarians except the holy desire to learn and live God's will for their state of life?

The bishop who ordained me once said that it takes 100 years and 100 good priests to make up for the scandal caused by the sins of one bad priest.

Our seminarians, along with the good priests ministering in our Archdiocese, want to be among the 100!

I am in awe of all of them, impressed by their courage, hard work, and holy zeal, wanting to be agents of transformation and to contribute to the cure.

Please join in taking action – like praying for more vocations to priesthood in the Archdiocese of Dubuque – in order to respond to and to prevent sex abuse of minors.

What else might we do?

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque